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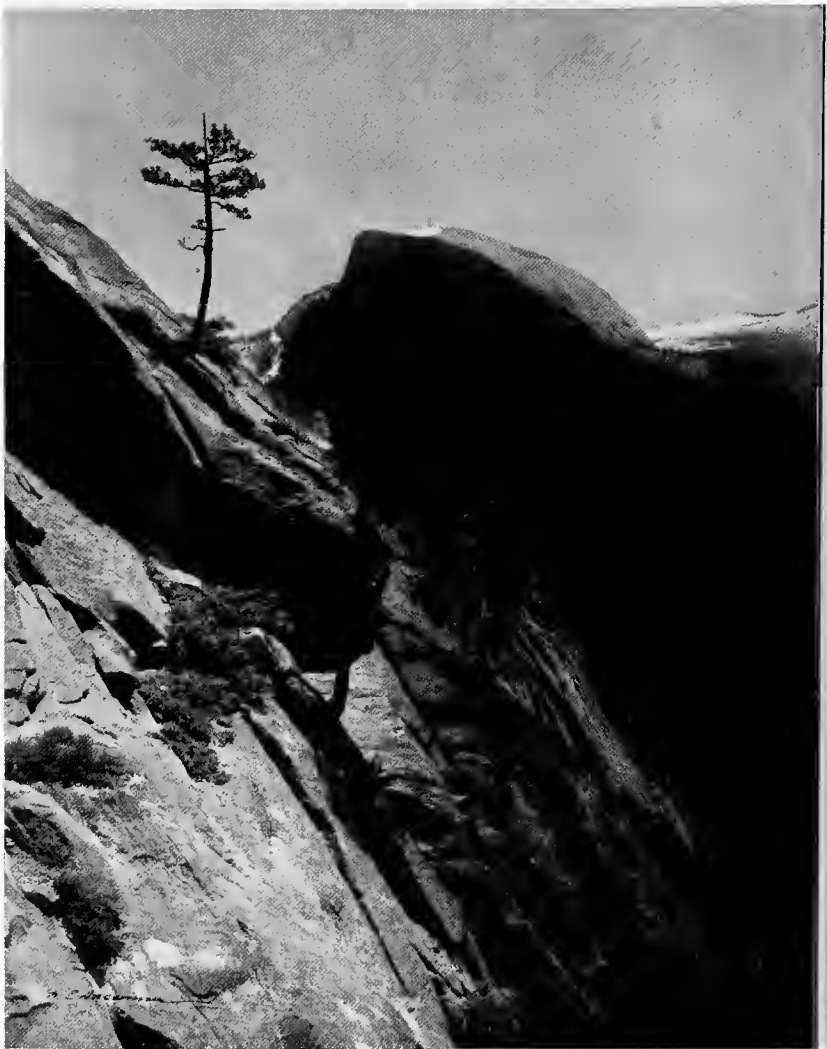
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A. M. ROBERTSON
San Francisco



From Yosemite Falls

Y O S E M I T E

An Ode

BY

GEORGE ~~STERLING~~



WITH

A Cover in Color After the Painting by

H. J. BREUER

AND

Illustrations After Photographs by

W. E. DASSONVILLE



San Francisco

A. M. ROBERTSON

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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After the painting by H. J. BREUER:

YOSEMITE	<i>On the cover</i>
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After photographs by W. E. DASSONVILLE:

From Yosemite Falls	<i>Frontispiece</i>
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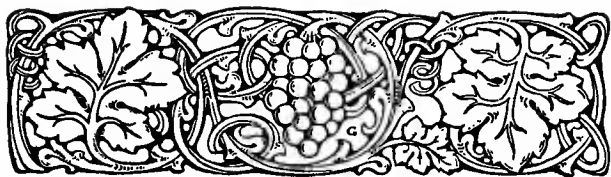
The Yosemite Falls	<i>Opposite page 2</i>
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The Bridal Veil Falls	6
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Twilight	10
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Morning—the Half-Dome	15
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Y O S E M I T E



Y O S E M I T E

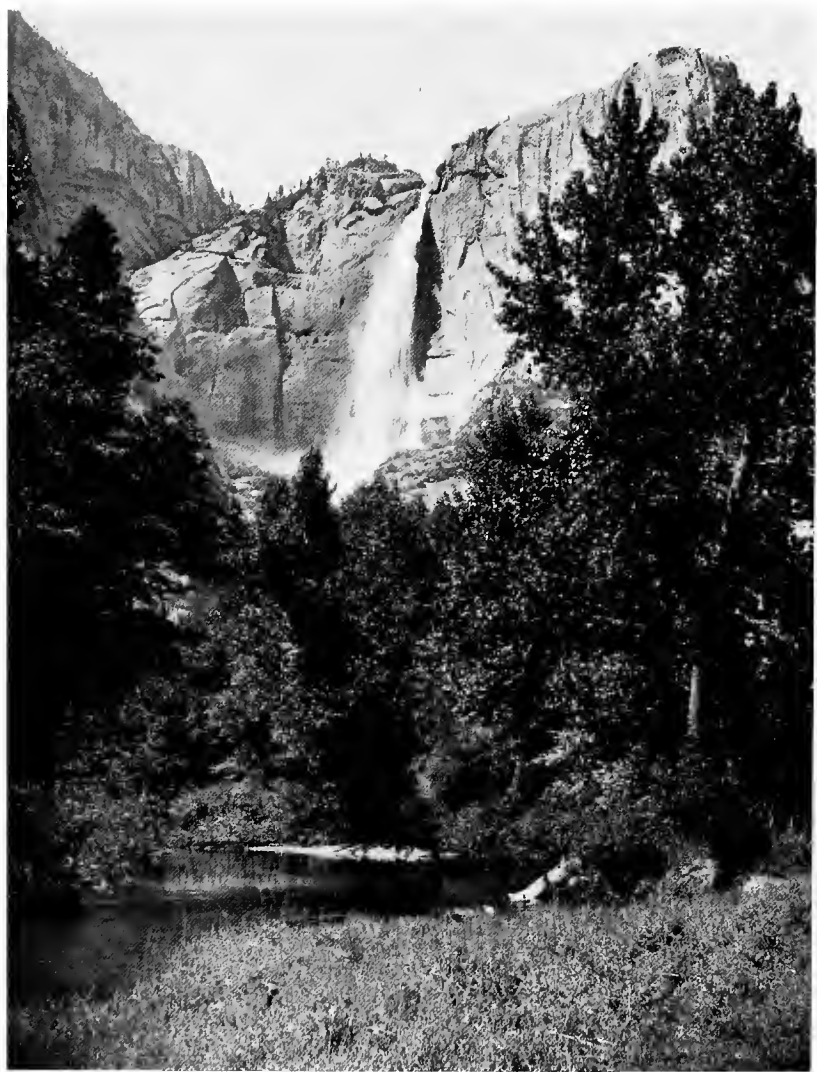
I

BEAUTY, whose face and mystery we seek,
Forever longing and forever foiled,—
Whose praise the voices of our art would speak,
And in whose faith all art and love have toiled,
Be gracious, where in vain,
Here at thy noblest fane,
Where silent summits lift,
I heap thine altar-stone with humble flow'rs,
The mute bestowal of my happier hours—
The hours that held thy pain,
The heart-ache of thy presence and its stress.
Be gracious to the giver and the gift,
And be thy ruth
Some aspect of thine inner loveliness
Or instant blaze
Of sunlight on the marbles of thy truth,
Where I may stand and gaze

Ere following night confess
How art betrays us, even in its youth,
And of thy sudden vision and its bliss
We give but broken news and songs amiss.

The primal gleam
Of thy far wings on Time's remoter skies
Drew first man's eyes
To that high star which is the light of Dream.
Dimly he saw
Thy splendor past the range of brutish law,
And slowly found the trace
And latency of thee
In fire and morning and the lily's cup,—
In quiet waters and the lifted sea,—
In his belovéd's face,
With eyes like those of the awakened fawn.
So grew his adoration, dawn and dawn,
Sunset and sunset slowly storing up
Their unforgotten flame
And nacre in his soul's deep dwelling-place,
Till at the last he named thee with thy name.

Thou, too, art bond to Change,
And we, the far descendants of the brute,



The Yosemite Falls

Find ever in thy realm the new and strange,
 Our vision of thee deepening with the years,
 And with our hearts that sorrow and transmute.
 By duty and the alchemy of tears,

 By all our nobler fears,
 We find thy graces for a time withheld—
 Honor and gentleness and faith in man,
 And self to self's own sacrifice impelled,
 And Love whose gaze grows upward, star by star.
 And what the farther glories of thy Plan
 We know not, thou whose wings go forth so far!

 But though thou be
 The daughter and the phantom of man's soul,
 Our hearts acknowledge thee,
 And thy last flight shall be the human goal.

II

Not on Romance's hills,
 Forsaken by the lover and the lute,
 Nor pure Illyrian rills,
 Nor western islands sung by lips long mute,
 Is thy last secrecy and utmost throne,
 Whose morning snows thou hast.
 Though one should seek thy temple, zone by zone,
 In this far valley would he kneel at last,

The world-wide questing done.
 Here shall the seeker scan
 The mighty chancel of thy holy place,
 Not as the fanes of man,
 Whose marble is a mist before Time's sun,—
 Whose term the years allot,—
 Whose ruins man shall trace,
 But as a House to be when Time is not.



O terrible, abiding and august,
 The walls wherefrom thine eagles have their path!
 Bastions sublime, cliffs inaccessible
 To giants in their wrath!
 O summits lifted unto endless Good!
 Heights that the hands of Law shall not annul
 When all the pyramids are trodden dust!
 Well were it that the fabled seraph stood
 With quenchless sword before the shielded portal,
 Crying, "Bare ye your heads and transient feet,
 For ye are face to face with the Immortal,
 The beauty which to gaze on is to live!"
 Lo! here sublimity and beauty meet,
 Meet in a final covenant and give
 Unto man's heart and soul for everlasting
 The sum and measure of their deathless grace,—

The guerdon of their good,
 A promise and a portent, a forecasting
 Of those far halls that yet shall house the race,
 When self and night have died in Brotherhood.

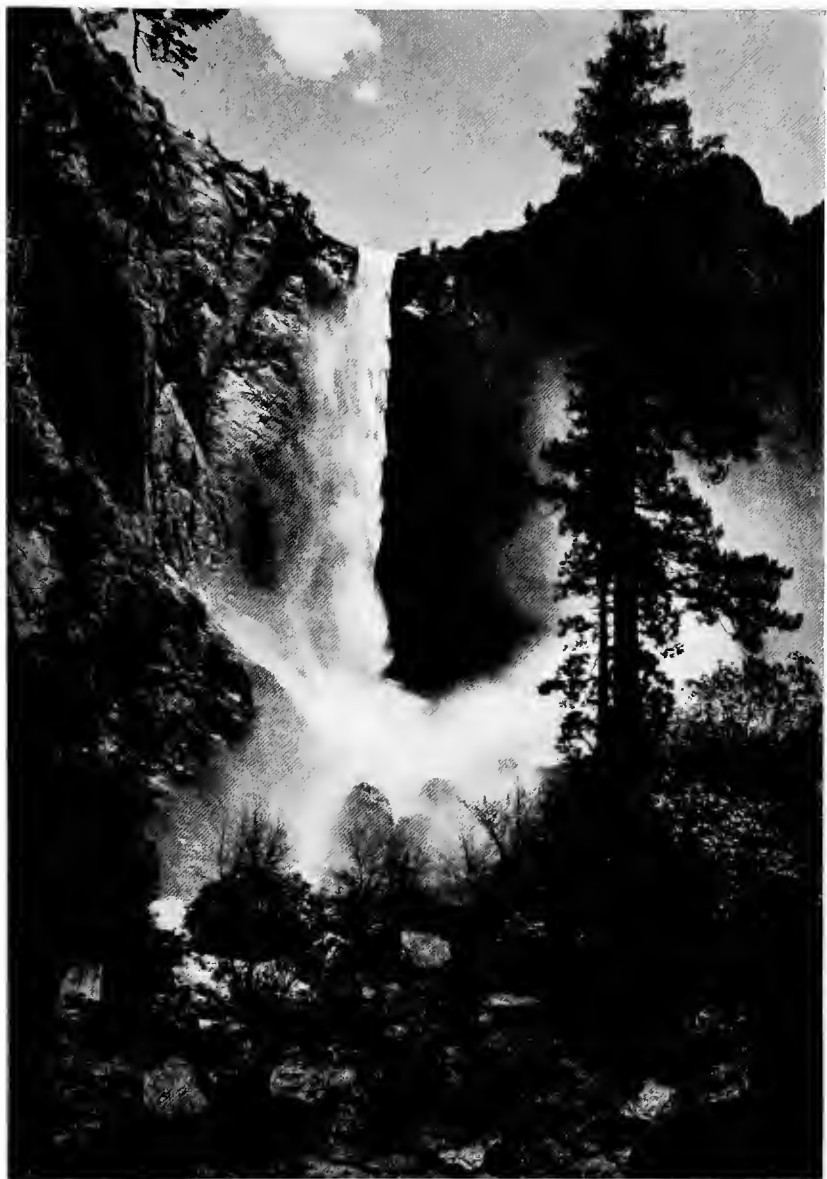


O domes and towers and stupendous walls!
 O voices of auroral waterfalls!
 Sierran thunderheads of cloud or stone
 That share the heavens as a realm o'erthrown!
 How high your ancestry in Nature's art!
 Here once the unfathomable granite lay
 Ungraven to the day
 And burdened with deep rivers of the ice.
 But age by age slow billows rent apart
 The cold foundations and the chiselled flanks,
 Till pinnacle and tower
 Told from their westward ranks
 Where sank the abysmal quarries of the Power.
 O patient centuries
 That with so vast device
 Frame strongholds such as these!
 O battlements arisen to the sky,
 Whence gods might chant to the departing sun
 Hymns of oblivion,
 Or iron litanies of worlds that die!

III

Here skyward gazing from the Valley's floor
 One sees the imperishable ramparts soar
 To base the doming blue;
 Yet here the noon takes not the vestal dew
 In emerald gardens walled with majesty
 And groves that were when Tyre was tyrannous—
 A dusk from sorrow free,
 A haunt of fauns where care seems not to be
 Nor any need of words.
 O refuge green and home unperilous
 In meadows ringed about with happy birds,
 Where butterflies are given all their will,—
 Where ferny fronds are curled,
 Shadowed by crags whose fall would shake the world
 O whisperings that stir,
 In slender crests of the aeolian fir,
 From winds that mourn in music, and are still!
 Recesses where the feet of Time are slow,
 Dwelt in by flowers whose name we would not know

But voices come that urge us from your peace,
 Where the inviolable waterfall
 Ere winter give it cease,
 Shakes all day long a thunder from its wall,



The Bridal Veil Falls

Or in the darkness, like a Titan's ghost,
Moans as the sea on some tormented coast.

Hark then its call!

To that high music give your souls in keeping!
Ascend at dawn to that uplifted place
Whence the doomed torrent, from its eyrie leaping,
Takes virgin vesture and immortal grace.

Beauty surpassing all!

Splendor of whiteness, foam of pearls that crash
To rainbow-mist on barriers immense!
Iris and veils of amethyst that lash
The eternal granite in magnificence!
Can eyes behold you save with rapture wet,
Or turn them from your glory and forget?



O falling rivers, beautiful in doom!

Your lofty raiments sway
As mountain-winds fling wider to the day
The sounding fabric of a stony loom.
Walls that endure, waters that pass away!
Peaks that are silent, streams that sunward call
From thundrous caldrons moulded not by hands!
Waters that flow to other men and lands,
Till, ocean clouds, ye take the heavens again,
And the Sierran rain

Quivers once more upon the mountain wall!
 Ye come and pass and come again—ah! so
 Do mortals come and go?
 And is the passing and returning all?
 O secret path of man!
 O butterfly above the waterfall!
 O lizard peering from El Capitan!
 Ashes of sunset, altar-fires of morn,
 Seasons of doom, and surge of wings reborn!

IV

Beauty on Heaven's nectar and Earth's bread
 Miraculously feeds.
 Her elder pathway leads
 To that acceptant spot
 Where scorn of any simple thing is not,
 And gods on dust and man on stars have fed.
 Yet needs she heights to test her pinions' pow'r,
 Ascendant from the glow-worm and the flow'r
 To heavens cloud-emppearled,—
 To thrones of azure air
 And snows from which the morning greets the world
 Look down, and see the grasses in her care;
 Then from this granite and tremendous dome
 Gaze eastward to the mountains in their might.

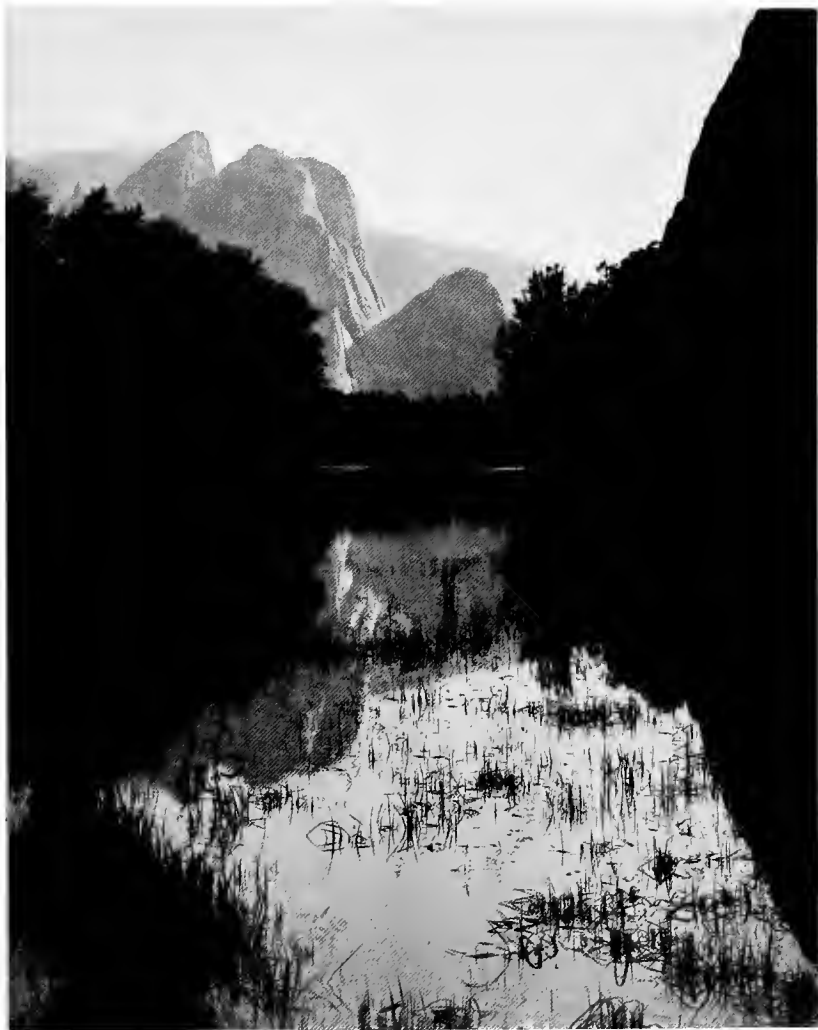
Far down the torrents foam;
 Far up the eagles float;
 Far off the enormous ramparts wait the night,
 Unsentineled, untroubled and remote.
 Southward to where the desert waits in death,
 And north to lonely Shasta's stormy breath,
 The fortresses of the eternal run,
 Unaltered by the lightnings and the sun.
 Thence the young rivers hasten to the deep,
 And there the advancing day
 Gathers its legions for their seaward sweep.
 Thence go the winds like angels forth to slay,
 And there all night the avalanches sleep.

Now lies the noon upon those fields of stone
 And forests where the wind seems glad to cease.
 Below, the snowy cataract alone,
 Though here unheard, is loud.
 Above, a single cloud
 Rears on the turquoise cavern of the sky
 Its towering pearl and alabaster throne.
 The vast, ineffable Sierran peace
 Holds not a sigh,
 Where the stilled soul accepts her large release
 From memories that sorrow ere they die.

Ah! human heart, that hast in store such tears!
 Put by thy grief beside these lucid fountains!
 Forget the sadder voices of thy years!
 Thy refuge is the everlasting mountains,
 Thy respite the compassion of their night,
 And crystal voices lifted to thine ears
 From those clear springs of loveliness and light.
 Far off, the cities roar;
 Far down, the world awaits thee, and its pain:
 Have rest, ere ancient burdens be once more,
 And silence, ere the tumult wake again!

✻

The swirling river murmurs to the fir
 And balsamed shadows stir;
 Far up the afternoon
 Floats the frail silver of the day-moon's dome.
 On summits glacier-hewn
 The reawakened winds begin to roam
 Sweet with the forest's myrrh,
 And casting on the world an undertone
 So deeper than their own!
 Follow, beneath the granite's rugged crown—
 O boiling gorges and victorious roar
 Of lion-throated torrents pouring down
 In sounding onset to the valley-floor!



Twilight

White bridals of the water and the air,
 As the rent crystal sweeps to choral foam!
 Oh! whiter than the star
 With no horizon-home,
 That sets not, though the truceless morning come!
 And fairer still than these
 Or surf of western seas,
 Thy rainbow, like an angel's scimitar,
 Slaying with beauty till the soul is dumb
 For lack of that high speech the seraphs know!
 By what acclaim shall man acknowledge this,
 And with what songs give raiment to his bliss?
 O floods and hues that flow!
 O chords and voices of the deathless dead,
 And visioned music of their lyric rite,
 When Beauty's altar shone with wilder light,
 And singing lips on richer milk were fed!

V

The hermit thrush has fluted from his tree,
 Unanswered in the quietude. The sun
 Goes forth on scarlet thresholds to the sea.
 The many shadows gather unto one,
 Paving the Valley in solemnity.
 The darkness does not fall,

But rising slow, the tidal shadow drowns,
 One after one, the ledges and the crowns,
 The graven cliffs, the ramparts and the spires.
 The world's arisen shade hath buried all,
 Save where, to us, the last of day's far fires,
 Ere sunset flee,
 High on the headland of the South Dome lies.
 O giant bulk! O monarch of our skies!
 Soaring in rose from twilight's purple sea!
 Thine afterglow, the memory of day,
 Can but a little stay;
 But in our souls the glory may not cease,
 One with ethereal things—
 The torrent's song, the cedar's whisperings,
 The dawn's divine increase,
 The loneliness and mystery and peace
 Of evening mountains watched from far away. . .

On snows and pinnacle and river lies
 The vast Sierran night, augustly dumb.
 Keep vigil, ere the faithful morning come
 Across Nevada's skies.
 Below the moonless heavens deeply starred,
 The forests sleep, unhaunted by the wind;
 The lone, Titanic peaks

Between the stars and forest stand at guard.
 What is it that the yearning planet seeks—
 This homeless world that wanders lost and blind?
 She finds not any solace in the night
 Nor haven for her flight:
 Let us forget the cold abyss, and turn
 To where man's hearthstones burn . . .
 Far eastward breaks the light
 On cities rising to their endless toil,
 On multitudes whose eyes
 The Vision flies—
 Serfs to the waiting engines and the soil.
 And little children to the untimely task
 Stumble at dawn, and know their masters sleep.
 O blind and bartered poor!
 Must these things be forever, though we ask
 Why ye to tawdry pleasures and false arts
 Must turn your cheated hearts?
 To these, and less,
 Barred from our earth's exalting loveliness.
 For alway must the monstrous Scheme endure
 That keeps the many to their labor bound—
 Banished from these clean heights and gracious ground?
 Shall not the atoning season come at last
 When any son of earth may lift his face

To battlements of this transcendent place—
 Freed from the hateful dungeons of the Past?
 O hungered mouths unfed
 From that immortal urn whose holy flood
 Is Beauty's holier blood!
 O sacrament of her terrestrial bread!
 O Valley waiting through the wistful years,
 The sure though distant tread
 Of those young armies of the Comrade State!
 Fair lands reconsecrate,
 And toils that yet shall end in happy tears!
 Under the midnight's arch,
 Slowly those ranks are forming for the march,
 Ere the Night falter and the legions are
 Led on and upward by their morning star.

✱

The morning star! Now eastward on the night
 Her pure, unstirring light
 Glows like the matin taper of a nun.
 Arcturus sets. The Pleiades, upborne
 On the wide surf of morn,
 Join shuddering the rout of stars begun
 By those red swords made vanguard to the sun.
 The Valley lies below us like a cup,
 Filled with the wine of Twilight and her dream.



Morning—the Half-Dome

Nevada flames. The mountain walls send up
 Their eagles on the morning, ere the gleam
 Of the great day-star fall on wood and stream
 From south to north
 What golden wings, what argent feet go forth
 On heaven and radiant snows!
 What archangelic flights
 Of seraphim from everlasting heights,—
 From citadels colossal, where the song
 Of giant winds is strong,
 And, washed in timeless fire, the granite glows
 With silver and unutterable rose!

❧
 O vaster Dawn, ascendant and sublime,
 That past the peaks of Time
 And midnight stars' array,
 Dost bear the magnitude of skies to be,
 What hopes go forth to thee!
 O glad, unrisen Day!
 The soul, an eagle from its eyrie yearning,
 Goes up against the splendor and the burning—
 Goes up, and sees afar the world made free!
 O liberty to come!
 What trumpets shall announce thee on what glooms?
 What lips now dumb

Shall sing thine ancient victories and dooms,
 And in what halls
Shall man set up an altar to thy star?
 Yea! though the time be far,
Shall not thy song be lifted to these walls
And on these peaks shall not thy banners shine?
 O Dawn divine!
On eastern skies I see thy chariots hurled,
 And on the reeling night
 The legions of thy light,
With morning! morning! morning! on the world!

THE END

